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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [KIRF](#) [KJUS](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [SMIG](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: SABEAN-MANDEANS: UNDER SIEGE BUT HOLDING ON

REF: A. BAGHDAD 589
[1](#)B. 2008 BAGHDAD 3244
[1](#)C. 2008 BAGHDAD 3357

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor Steve Walker for Reason 1.4 (d)

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Sabeen-Mandean leaders living in Iraq describe their community as desperately wanting to remain and participate in the country's political life rather than emigrate abroad, despite being the frequent targets of criminal elements. These leaders tell us that members of the community who are living abroad as refugees would like to return to Iraq, but can not, since Sabeen-Mandean continue to be the victims of criminals who murder, kidnap and extort them for money. At the same time, the Sabeen-Mandean community sees the benefit of having a member on the Baghdad Provincial Council and would like to have a parliamentary seat set aside for them as part of the January 2010 national elections to guarantee that their voice is heard. End summary.

Sabeen-Mandean by the Numbers

[1](#)2. (C) From June 24-29, Poloff met with four Sabeen-Mandean leaders, including the deputy Patriarch of the Sabeen-Mandean community Sheikh Alaa Aziz Tareesh, the Secretary of the Sabeen-Mandean Council Husain al-Zuhairy, Iraqi ambassadorial nominee Dr. Matheel al-Sabti, and Sabeen-Mandean Endowment Director Zahroon Thomah. These leaders painted a picture of a community that desires to remain in Iraq despite the hardships that it has faced (refs A and B). Al-Zuhairy told Poloff that the Mandean consider themselves to be the original inhabitants of Iraq and stated that "if we leave Iraq completely, it will be the end of our religion."

[1](#)3. (C) Since 2003, the Sabeen-Mandean community has witnessed the majority of its members flee Iraq. UNHCR reports indicate that there are approximately 12,000 Sabeen-Mandean registered as refugees in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Egypt or four percent of all Iraqi refugees. According to statistics from the Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, 1,210 Sabeen-Mandean refugees have been resettled to the United States as of June 1, 2009, with another 768 applications pending. Mandean Endowment Director Thomah told Poloff that the Patriarch of the Sabeen-Mandean, Sheikh Sattar Hillo, had recently received his residency permit to live in Australia. Nevertheless, Sheikh Tareesh told Poloff on June 29 that there were "lots" of Sabeen-Mandean families who were thinking of returning to Iraq, but that recent security incidents (see below) had persuaded them to remain abroad. He predicted that when the security situation is safe enough, many Mandean would return to Iraq.

[1](#)4. (C) At the same time, Sabeen-Mandean leaders report that

their community in Iraq remains larger than previously reported, although their estimates vary considerably and may be inaccurate. On the high end, Mandaean Council Secretary al-Zuhairy told Poloff on June 29 that 20,000 members of the 50,000 strong Mandaean community remain in Iraq. Mandaean Endowment Director Zahroon, in contrast, estimated that the Mandaean community had 12,000 members remaining in Iraq with 6,000 located in Baghdad. (Note: In the 2008 International Religious Freedom Report, the Sabeian-Mandaean community was estimated to have 3,500-5,000 members in Iraq. End note.) Both Al-Zuhairy and Zahroon noted that the Sabeian-Mandaean community is widely dispersed across Iraq with larger communities located in Baghdad, Imara, Nasriyah and Basra and smaller communities located in diverse locations like Qsmaller communities located in diverse locations like Diwaniyah, Ramadi, Kirkuk, Erbil and Wasit. According to these leaders, the only prerequisite for a Mandaean community is the presence of running water, which plays a key role in their religious practices. In Baghdad the community continues to host large baptismal ceremonies along the Tigris having performed one on March 3 that involved hundreds of people. Mandaean leaders noted that another ceremony was planned for July 19.

Under Siege

15. (C) On a socio-economic level, the Sabeian-Mandaean community is well known for its beliefs in nonviolence and for its involvement in the gold and jewelry trade, a combination that continues to make it a target for criminal elements. While Mandaean leaders concede that the overall

* Missing Section 002 *
